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SUBJECT: AU Efforts IN The Comoros Continue

REF: ANTAN 178
ANTAN 153

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: After the Inter-Comoran Dialogue (REFTELS), AU S/E Madeira continues to mediate in the Comoros. With guidance from Addis, he brokered a meeting between President Sambi and the island presidents and obtained agreement for all parliamentary elections to take place in 2009. Tanzanian President Kikwete will reportedly carry a message this week for Sambi to "act based on consensus," which is AU-speak for cautioning about efforts to extend his mandate. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) African Union Special Envoy Madeira is back in the Comoros after consulting with the AU Peace and Security Council in Addis Ababa. Accompanied by the international community (French, UN, Chinese, South Africa, Arab League, Libya, Embassy Comoros Officer), S/E Madeira told President Sambi March 21 the Inter-Comoran Dialogue was a major step. He obtained Sambi's agreement to hold parliamentary elections in 2009 (National Assembly, and three Island Assemblies), which is a key demand of the "opposition." The President also confirmed he is taking into account many recommendations from the Dialogue. S/E Maderia also confirmed that President Sambi has invited the three island executives to a meeting March 23 - such direct contact has not occurred in over a year.

¶3. (SBU) Dialogue discussions on institutions and governance made progress; even the hotly-debated question of the constitution was useful. The key sticking point, all agreed, was President Sambi's intention to extend his mandate one year to 2011. The President insisted this was only/only a means to harmonize elections (Comment: The excuse is clever, the international community has complained about the cost of holding many separate elections. End Comment). Sambi restated his offer to step down in 2010 if the three island Presidents agree to do the same, so all four executives can be elected at once. As always, the President asserted the people are sovereign and his right to hold a referendum is clear.

President Kikwete
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¶4. (SBU) President Sambi invited the dip corps to join him and Tanzanian President Kikwete at a celebration March 25 of the one-year anniversary of the African Union military intervention in Anjouan to restore order and depose Colonel Bacar. Separately, S/E Madeira told Comoros Officer that President Kikwete will carry AU messages to Sambi, encouraging him to "act by consensus," consider stability and reconciliation, and possibly to discourage him from seeking to extend his mandate.

Opposition Leader Abdouwahabi
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¶5. (SBU) Next AU S/E Maderia and dip corps went to see Grande Comore Island President Abdouwahabi, who confirmed he would agree to see Sambi March 23, but was otherwise intransigent. He unabashedly confirmed rumors that on March 20 he had prevented Sambi from attending prayers in his home village of Iconi and March 21 had

prevented Sambi from inaugurating a small public works project there. His pride and defiance in these acts was unmistakable. He scoffed at the notion that he and fellow island presidents might shorten their mandates for the good of the country and for Sambi to step down in 2010.

MARQUARDT